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ABSTRACT

Controversies over the best way to teach word recognition in beginning reading instruction have raged for generations. The goal has been to acquire automatic skills for recoding written language into speech. At this time, a popular theory suggests that phonics is better than the look-and-say method; however the evidence does not support this conclusion. Several factors related to the mismatches of speech and writing are: self-defeating phonic rules, variable relationships between speech sounds and letters, and unreliable realtionships between spellings and etymology. A defensible position regarding this controversy is to legitimize phonics by reducing orthographic irregularities. This paper also discusses questions concerning word perception, the alphabetic principle, and perceptual learning. The need for knowledge of the structure of orthography and the structure of language are emphasized. Several phonic methods are discussed: letter phonics, syllabic methods, spelling patterns, phonetic methods, blending, phonics countdown, respelling by word patterns, and syllable phonics. The various sight word methods discussed are pictured word cards, flash cards, lists of common words, and tell the child the word method. Areas for research are suggested. (MKM)

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SIGHT WORDS AND/OR PHONICS *

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A Position

For generations, controversies have raged relentlessly over how to teach reading, mostly focussed on one facet of reading instruction: how to teach pupils to cognize and recognize words (word forms?) in beginning reading. At one time or another, protagonists have defended with all their energies (1) alphabetic, or spelling, methods, (2) "phonetic" methods, (3) phonic methods, (4) sight-word methods, and (5) spelling-pattern methods. Their goal has been an honorable and legitimate one: use of automatic skills for recoding written language into speech, leaving the learner's one mind for decoding the message. But the problems of word perception simply won't go away.

At this time, phonic zealots, journalists, and others doing superficial critiques of word learning have resolved all the problems into the simplistic dichotomy: phonics versus the look-and-say method. In their profound innocence, they cry for a"return to phonics"--the time-tested method.

Today most parents and teachers are for motherhood, apple pie, honesty in government, lower taxes, more money, less inflation, equal opportunity--and phonics. Then, too, a growing number of thinking professionals lend some legitimacy to meaningful sight-word methods to provide a basis for phonics and to admit the reality of irregularly spelled words that do not fit

the rules. Finally, recognition is being accorded scholars --from linguistics, orthography, psychology, and other disciplines--who are examining the medium, the spelling system or lack of system, which causes the failures of phonics and which creates a real need to consider sight methods.

The evidence for an all-out phonics method and against a sight-word method is underwhelming. An increasing mass of evidence points the finger of guilt at several factors related to the mismatches of speech and writing:

1. Self-defeating phonic rules
2. Variable relationships between speech sounds and letters
3. Unreliable relationships between spellings and etymology

A defensible position regarding this artificial but real controversy is to legitimize phonics by reducing orthographic irregularities which offer insurmountable roadblocks to many children. Two caveats merit identification:

1. Speech symbolizes organized experience; writing is another layer of symbols representing speech. Hence, reading is two steps removed from reality.
2. A scientific, multi-disciplinary approach to the study of orthography and to proposals for reform is long overdue. On the other hand, a revised, validated spelling system may legitimize phonic teaching, but this revision may yield only ONE of MANY needed means of escalating reading instruction.

Word Perception: Timely Questions

Our chief concern is with the development of automatic responses to ink marks on the printed page, leaving the learner's ONE mind free to decode the message. This discussion deals with these crucial questions:

1. Why has phonics instruction failed to be effective?
   a. Are phonic methods plural?
   b. Why have phonic readers fallen into disrepute?
   c. Why has public intrust in phonics waxed and waned for generations?

2. Why has the look-and-say (sight,word or whole word) method been retained?
   a. Are sight methods plural?
   b. Why has the public, especially parents, rebelled against the so-called look-and-say "method"?
   c. Why have sight-word criteria been articulated as preparation for phonics?

3. Is a consideration of phonic methods and sight methods an either-or proposition, in relation to conventional spelling (traditional orthography)?

4. Why do some beginners in reading learn to talk easily but have difficulty with the print marks? That is, why is the transition from spoken to visible language so difficult?

5. What teaching strategies need to be considered in wedding the phonological-orthographic dimensions for efficient word perception and cognition (comprehension)?

6. To what extent do different shapes for the same letters (e.g., A-a) contribute to frustration in beginning reading?

7. Do irregularities in the spelling system contribute to common reading difficulties and, possibly, to dyslexia?

The Alphabetic Principle

English is an alphabetic writing system as contrasted to pictographic, ideographic, logographic, or "phonetic" systems. Yet, English writing makes use of a number of logograms, as the numeral 6 (six), etc. (et cetera), $ (dollar). Added to these deviations from the alphabetic principle are contractions, abbreviations, contradictions between letter names and speech sounds, and 23 letters plus c, q, and x to represent about 42 distinctive speech sounds (phonemes). In brief, the English alphabet is phonemically based but, strictly speaking, is neither a phonetic nor a phonemic alphabet.

The evolution of the Greek-Roman alphabet, Semitic in origin, used for English writing dates back to at least 1400 B.C. Phoenicians, neighbors of the Greeks, used characters to represent their consonant sounds. To these consonant characters, the Greeks added seven vowel letters to represent all the sounds in their language. Then the Greeks arranged the letters in a fixed (alpha, beta, gamma) order (possibly to facilitate memorization), assigned a name to each letter, established a left-to-right direction of writing, and concerned themselves with the shapes (forms) of letters.

When the Romans borrowed the Greek letters, probably via the Etruscans, they used the sounds of the vowels for vowel letter names and consonant sounds plus vowel sounds for the names of consonant letters. This bit of revised borrowing is said to have caused the big "snafu" regarding letter names and sounds they represent, especially the delusion regarding learning letter names as a prelude to beginning reading.

The Old English (500 to 1066 A.D.) alphabet was an adaptation of the Roman alphabet, with provision for more than the five vowel spellings of Latin. Although there were different spellings, Old English spelling patterns were fairly consistent. It is also interesting to note that Old English was quite replete with inflections as indicators of meaning.

During this period, English was influenced by the Scandanavian vocabulary of the Vikings, whcih tends to survive in Modern English. However, most Old English words were Germanic in origin.

Middle English (1100 to 1500 A.D.) was influenced by the Norman-French (1066 A.D.) invaders, by the neighboring Dutch, and by more borrowings from the Latin lexicon. During this period, word order, the most important feature of Modern English began to take precedence over word endings, used in Latin, for signalling

meaning. Many of the inflections of Old English came to be spelled with final e which today is written in words, as in name. Then, too, at this time, spelling shifted somewhat from the phonemic basis of Anglo Saxon with the French th replacing odd (þ) / letter ; k before e and i (e.g., keen for cene), the digraph ou (e.g., h(ou)se); doubling of consonants (e.g., bitter vs O.E. biter).

Modern English (beginning circa 1500 A.D.), basically Germanic, has been influenced by many factors: Caxton's introduction of the printing press (1477), standardization on London dialect, enlargement of the vocabulary largely by adapting words from Greek and Latin, and so on. Because of borrowings from many languages, especially via Greek and French through Latin, orthography has become quite complex. For example, English is one of the very few spelling systems in which to, blue, shoe, few, through rhyme. Today, about 12 percent of the people in the world use English.

One of the major events in the development of Modern English was the "Great Vowel Shift" of the fifteenth century. This shift in vowel and diphthong phonemes was accomplished WITHOUT a shift in spellings! Spellings were often introduced falsely to indicate etymology, as writing s in island, b in debt which have no basis in etymology.

American English began to change from that of the old country soon after colonization. For example, words (e.g., squash, wigwam, tomahawk, wampum, totem, tepee, maize) were borrowed from the native Indians. In fact, many of our states have Indian names: Dakota, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kansas, Kentucky, Tennessee, Michigan, Oklahoma, Texas.

From this truncated, oversimplifi review, it is quite clear how the term accursed spelling has been used to describe it. In fact, Mario Pei, after reviewing the structural merits and pronunciation difficulties of Modern English, was moved to say, "English spelling . . . is a monument to traditionalism so weird as to be practically incredible." (The Story of Language, J.B. Lippincott Co., 1949, p.293.)

English, therefore, has a very interesting and somewhat consistent structure, with notable exceptions:

1. Invariable forms in parts of speech
   a. Case endings for nouns are discarded
      (1) Exception: In pronunciation, letter s of plurals represents /s/ following unvoiced consonants (e.g., boats, looks, slips) and /z/ after voiced consonants, nasals, liquids, and vowels (e.g., legs, dolls, boys).

(2) Exception: Possessives; e.g., boy's (Only case ending retained)

(3) Exceptions to -s and -es (e.g., boys, boxes); plurals of nouns: man-men; child-children; foot-feet; deer-deer; lady-ladies; leaf-leaves

b. Inflections for verbs are limited

(1) Verbs: Internal vowel changes in conjugation (five forms in strong verbs), as write, writes, writing, wrote, written and sing, sings, singing, sang, sung; addition of suffixes without internal vowel changes (four forms in weak verbs), as love, loves, loving, loved and work, works, working, worked

(2) Exception: do-does, has-have, as in "He (does)" and "Does he (have)"

(3) Exceptions: In pronunciation, -ed after t or d, as in wanted, landed; -ed as in asked, moaned

2. Demonstrative pronouns: Number only; e.g., this-these; that-those

3. Personal, possessive, relative, and interrogative pronouns: Gender, number, or case (e.g., I, we, me, us; my-mine; who-whom

Perceptual Learning

An antiquated orthographic system which has not kept pace with pronunciation has created complexities in perceptual learning:

1. Category learning

A substantial number of words can be identified by analogy , as and-hat-cap, leg-pet, big-hit, hot-not, bug-fun. These examples represent five sub-types of category learning that signal pronunciation.

2. Cue learning

A cue is a part of a spelling that serves as an aid to the pronunciation of a word, as ar in car-part, aw in saw-draw, all in call-ball, ind in kind-find, and so on. To establish sub-rules for these cues only complicates learning; instead, these cues are learned via their predictable pronunciation .

3. Probability learning

A spelling (phonogram) may represent different sounds, as oo in moon-look. Or, the same sound may be represented by different spellings, as /ɚr/ in h(er), b(ir)d, h(ear)d, h(ur)t, w(or)d. On the other hand, sew may be the only common word in which the phonogram ew represents /ō/ but ew represents /yü/ with some consistency in few-mew and other words, as well as /ü/ in new, stew, dew, flew, and a number of other words. But cue learning appears to be requisite to probability learning.

4. Alternation learning

As a type of perceptual learning, alternation appears to be a requisite at higher reading levels.

a. Shift from zero phoneme to pronunciation phoneme, as in bom(b)-bom(b)astic
autum(n)-autum(n)al

b. Shift in phoneme, as in
logi(c)-logi(c)ian
met(a)l-met(a)llic
desi(g)n-desi(g)nate
ign(i)te-ign(i)tion
m(ea)n-m(ea)nt

The above and other types of alternations have a long and interesting history. But they introduce another type of perceptual learning.

One of the aims of revised spellings in beginning reading is to increase the probability of category learning--the use of analogy. Apparently, a good reader has acquired an unusual learning set--a set for diversity in spellings. In terms of traditional orthography, uncertainty has a high priority.

Phonics

There is more than one way to view the relationships between sequences of letters and sequences of speech sounds. The first is the phonic approach, introduced by Valentin Ickelsamer in 1534, which has had a long and checkered history. Briefly, different phonic approaches have included the Aldine final blend (e.g., _at_ in _hat_), Beacon initial blend (e.g., _ha_ in _hat_), Cordts whole word versus phonic (graphic) parts in isolation, and "sounding" phonics leading to what was called "hiss and groan" phonics, and so on.

In general, phonic methods have tended to rely on the unquestioned use of fallible, highly complex, concept burdened, and unreliable vowel rules. Irregularly spelled words (e.g., _have_ vs. _gave_ and _said_ -- _you_) were passed over or taught by the sight-word "method". In short, phonic rules have been accepted on misplaced faith because other alternatives were not considered.

Another view of phonics is the spelling pattern plan proposed by Leonard Bloomfield and his linguistic followers. This approach was primarily

(1) renaming vowel "rules as spelling patterns and

(2) introducing "regularly" spelled words in reading materials for beginners.

There are many reasons why this plan has fallen into disuse.

Finally, attempts have been made to legitimatize phonics in beginning reading via more nearly consistent spellings. At the latest count, there are at least 53 proposals -- a few bizarre, some with possibilities, ALL in need of basic research. Not to be overlooked is a plan to give self-help to beginners by means of respelling within previously learned spelling patterns; e.g., said (sed), was (wuz).

In a publication on Using Words and Improving the Teaching of Spelling in Elementary Skills, a committee in a large city listed 13 "Common Reasons for Incorrect Spelling." Not one mention was made of inconsistencies in orthography!

Phonic zealots and tyros who are noted for their excesses and who go over the deep end of orthography, oversimplify the medium (spelling system) and its complex relationships to language (speech). In fact, some spelling reformers, interested in legitimatizing phonics, tend to limit their concern to stressed syllables of words pronounced in isolation from their syntactic and semantic contexts.

In 1921, Fernald and Keller published their article on tactile and kinaesthetic techniques. These were syllable phonic techniques, labeled by my graduate students at Penn State (circa 1937) as the VAKT and VAK respectively. Actually, the VAKT and VAK are a "syllable phonics" approach to word perception placing a premium on different modalities of learning which reinforce the attention factor. Incidentally, these techniques are made ineffective by authors of extant publications who misquote Fernald and Keller, making a letter-by-letter mish-mash of them.

Any serious discussion of phonics in reading instruction leads directly to the study of the structure of language (speech) and the study of the structure of orthography (the spelling system with the emphasis on system). In VIEWPOINTS III (Spelling Progress Bulletin, Fall 1975, pp. 17-18) theoretical viewpoints regarding speech - writing relationships were discussed.

Language (speech) has at least three dimensions:

1. Phonological, expressed in groups of speech sounds called phonemes
2. Grammatical, embracing syntax and semantics
3. Semantic, the message bearing dimension

Yet, publications on the teaching of reading for many generations have paraded a surfeit of underwhelming and overwhelming cliches on phonics: decoding, processing orthographic information, breaking the sound barrier, reading with phonics, letter phonics, independence in reading via phonics and "structural analysis", sounds and letters, talking alphabets, unlocking words and plain talk, fun with phonics, spelling patterns, the teaching of sounding, functional phonetics, phonics and word power, the linguistic method, words in color and so on ad nauseum. These cliches have been perpetuated by well-intentioned parents unsophisticated about the writing system (orthography), by journalists who rile against the word method and make superficial pleas for return to the "alphabet" method and phonics, and by national and state organizations of both parents and teachers. Unfortunately, these confusions exist in profusion at the present time because very few concerned with reading instruction have a profound understanding of the facts of either orthography or word perception. In short, phonics--long a magic, ubiquitous word--is fast losing its glamor under the spotlight of reality.

Phonic Methods

Phonic methods are plural; there is no such thing as THE phonic method. During the 450 years since Ickelsamer is said to have originated "the" phonic method, there have been many methods under this rubric: letter phonics versus word phonics; synthetic methods (blending sounds into syllables and words) versus analytic methods (identifying parts of whole words); initial blend versus final blend ; phonic rules and/or spelling patterns; and so on. At the time of their introductions, authors of these methods claimed independence in reading for the beginner--independence in recoding writing into speech, but not necessarily independence in decoding the message.

Critics of phonic methods have been aware of spelling inconsistencies as a factor in complicating "phonogram" phonics and phonic rules. In 1929, Luella Cole, for example, commented: "One cannot teach a language [orthography] by exclusively phonetic [sic] methods unless the sounds and the spelling have a fixed and invariable relationship." (The Improvement of Reading, p.8.)

1. Letter phonics

The alphabet (spelling) method was based on the names of the letters; the letter-phonics "method," on the sounds of letters. The alphabetic method of teaching reading required the learner to spell a word by naming the letters and then to pronounce the word. On the other hand, some systems of phonics in the past have required the pupil to match the letters by which a word is spelled with the specific "sounds" which the letters "say"--sometimes called "sounding out" words, preceded by learning a "sight" vocabulary. To th/ is day, many parents and some teachers tell the hapless child who asks for help on an unknown word:

a. "You know all the letters. So spell it out."

b. "Sound out the letters."

Both the alphabetic method and "letter" phonics--at different times, or "the good old way"--are now chiefly of historical interest. Witness this statement.

> Edmund Huey, The Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading, 1908, p.661:
>
> Just how the naming of letters was supposed to assist in pronouncing the word, it is difficult to see.

2. Syllabic methods

One outgrowth of the alphabet, or spelling, method was the monosyllabic method. In th/ is syllabic method, certain vowel-consonant and consonant-vowel combinations were spelled and pronounced. Two-letter combinations included ab-eb-ib. Later, three-vowel combinations were introduced, as glo-flo.

The first edition of the Hornbook (really a "paddle" on which was fastened a parchment covered by horn), imported from England, presented only the alphabet. Later editions added syllables and religious selections. Vowel-consonant syllables included ab,ib, ob, ub; consonant-vowel syllables, ba, bi, bo, bu. This Hornbook was one of the first instructional materials used in America.

Later, The New England Primer (October 5, 1683) offered "Easy Syllables for Children." These syllables included those mentioned above and others, as av, ev, iv, ov, uv. The syllabarium became a special feature of early instructional materials. This syllabarium logically introduced two-letter syllables and increased the number of letters to six.

Apparently recognizing the consonant boundaries of syllables and the need for a consonant-vowel pronunciation unit, Noah Webster (1807-1827) organized syllables according to similarity of sounds:

ba ca da fa pa

ba be bi bo bu by

Oldsters have delighted in singing these syllables for this writer.

Finally, the emphasis was shifted to phonics (called "phonetics") and words around 1840, and the syllabarium fell into disuse.

3. Spelling patterns

Some phonics methods of olden days stressed the first teaching of words with somewhat regular spellings, as a in cat, e in wet, i in bit, o in not, and u in cut. These uninteresting, hard-to-read, tongue-twisting materials written with closed syllables appeared:

The red hen is in the pen.

The pig in a wig did a jig. (See Alfred Hayes, Phonoscript Primer, 1922.)

The above type of material fell into disrepute for several reasons:

a. Intonation patterns were violated.

b. The content was unrelated to interests of the child; the reading material was artificial.

c. The vocabulary was severely limited; everyday words in the child's lexicon were omitted. This approach to vocabulary control probably had as many demerits as the "social utility," or frequency-of-usage, control of most extant readers since the 1920's.

d. The contrast of visual patterns of words was limited, leading to confusion of words of similar length, as of-if, is-so, was-saw.

Interest in spelling patterns for developing phonic skills was renewed by the publication of Bloomfield's Language in 1932. Some of Bloomfield's disciples carried this approach to the extreme via the linguistic method.

As a result, these examples of writing appeared in beginning reading books, which were not unlike phonoscript phonics:

Nan can fan Dan.

Tad had a gas can.

A bad pup got mud on a rug.

Included in these readers were these activities:

cob fob gob hob

sod tod vod od

Clinicians who have worked with dyslexics (as defined by neurologists) know that they can be trained to make automatic responses on these words. But when the dyslexic's sing-song performance is interrupted to check on meaning, he must close his eyes and say the word over and over to associate it with a referent. The same observation can be made of "normal" beginners in reading.

4. Phonetic Methods

As late as 1914, Paul Klapper and other authors of professional textbooks on reading used the term phonetic method to apply to the use of "fixing signs", or diacritical marks, referred to in historical surveys of methodology. Klapper, however, refuted this method, which was in actuality a medium. More recently, Edward Fry has experimented with diacritical marks as signals to pronunciation. In reality, these are "promising orthographies."

Edwin Leigh (circa 1870) devised a variation of the spelling method to aid the learner in the prediction of pronunciation. In general, he added new characters by modifying traditional letter forms: "silent" letters, as in de(b)t, printed in hair lines; special marks, as /ȯ, a̤/ in water and /aů/ in out.

5. Blending

Synthesis of the sounds of phonograms into words had its highly visible protagonists, as the authors of the Beacon initial-blend method and the Aldine final-blend method. Of course, sounds not their visual representations, called phonograms, are blended--a concept NOT understood by everyone

In the initial-blend system, the first consonant-vowel sounds of words were learned as "families." For example:

ba - ck	nu - t
ba - t	si - t
ba - g	fa - t

In these examples, the initial blends were ba, nu, si, fa.

In the final-blend system, the final vowel-consonant sounds of words were learned as "families." For example:

s - and	s - and
h - and	s - ing
b - and	s - it
st - and	s - ad
gr - and	s - un

In these examples, the final blends were and, ing, it, ad, un,

One of the advantages of blending over letter-phonics was the recognition of pronounceable units, as ba in back and ad of sad. Unfortunately, these phonic systems were taught in isolation from the reading activity, usually in a separate period. These activities permitted only partial perceptual closure and no opportunity for cognitive closure. In addition to textbooks, phonic charts and phonic flash cards were used.

6. Phonics countdown

Recently, the writer has been using a phonics countdown for regularly spelled, stressed syllables. In using this technique, the child learns the phonic/structure (phoneme-grapheme) of the word by responding to meaning--referential or linguistic, the consonant-vowel sound blend, the vowel-consonant sound blend, and the vowel sound, as follows:

(meaning)	(meaning)
bad	dark
bad	dark
bad	dark
bad	dark
bad	dark
(meaning)	(meaning)

This technique is also applied to the stressed syllable of words:

(meaning)	(meaning
little	around
little	around
little	around
little	around
little	around
little	around
little	around
(meaning)	(meaning)

This procedure has several advantages:

a. The word is identified during the silent reading and recorded by the child for follow-up study.

b. The study of the word is introduced in a meaningful setting and meaning is consumated following a systematic study of its structure--providing effective perceptual and cognitive closure.

c. The whole word is studied at each step.

d. Consonant boundaries of the syllable are kept intact.

e. Consonant sounds are blended with the succeeding or preceding vowel sound, avoiding distorted pronunciation, or sounding,via pronounceable units of the whole word.

f. Attention is focussed on the informative substructures of the word.

g. Crucial factors in word perception are brought into functioning, as immediate need, grouping parts of the word into pronounceable units, closure for meaning, attention to focal points, feed forward and feedback between lexical word and phonological word, set for word perception by structures, and so on.

7. Respelling by word patterns

Another technique used by the writer for irregularly spelled words is the use of respellings in terms of word patterns. These respellings are used in study pages preceding and following the use of the words in a reading selection. Examples include:

one (wun)

come (cum)
from (frum)
laugh (laf)

of (uv)

This type of self-help serves several purposes:

a. Phonics instruction is legitimated and reinforced as a matter of course.

b. The pupils is dealing with known elements, as the (C)-V-C pattern to signal the pronunciation of from (frum).

c. The pupil gradually learns that different spellings are used for the same sounds, as gh for f /f/ in laugh.

d. The pupil achieves a degree of word-perception security via self-help.

8. Syllable phonics

Although a few two-syllable words (e.g., little, again) are listed in beginning reading materials, syllable phonics are not considered in this discussion. Inflection, derivation, compounding, and syllable stress are a mosaic of orthographic-phonologic situations meriting comprehensive treatment. Hence, syllabic phonics will be the topic of a subsequent publication.

Sight Word Methods

Today there is much wailing against THE word method by journalists who find it profitable to get into the act of criticizing the poor showing of elementary, secondary, and college students in reading tests. These unsophisticated attacks are very superficial, leading parents to join in the fray. With little or no understanding of the vagaries of the English spelling system and, therefore, "unreliable and cumbersome" phonic programs, these self-appointed critics called for the return to phonics and the complete rejection of the word method. In fact, the word method has been called some three-phoneme names: sight, look-and-say, and look-and-guess.

What journalists and parents need is some understanding of WHY word methods evolved and why they are being continued. They need to be brought up short by seriously considering some crucial questions regarding beginning reading:

How can phonics be applied to the most commonly used words, as you, one, was?

What phonic rule applies to the common words done, come, have?

What phonic rules apply to w(a)nt, wh(a)t, (a)ny?

What is the meaning of function words, as of, or, to?

What phonic rule or rules apply to words unstressed in phrases of conversational speech, as the, for, and?

Before the first two questions are "answered," phonic zealots, naive journalists, and parents have to surrender in despair. They are soon aware of the vagaries of the spelling system that make a mockery of rules for reading.

More than three-hundred years ago, Comenius suggested the word method in his Orbis Sensualium Pictus (Visible World, 1658). Following publications of this topic in France, Worcester (1828), Bumstead (1840), Webb (1846), and others in the United States reacted strongly against alphabet, or spelling, methods by endorsing word methods. These methods were hailed as revolutionary in beginning reading. However, they were followed at higher reading levels by alphabetic--"phonetic" methods. In general, word methods placed a higher premium on meaning in the reading process.

Like phonic methods, sight-word methods are as plural as children in a class. These methods include:

1. Pictured word cards

These "flash" cards have a word and picture on one side and only the word on the other side. After flashing the sides with word-pictures, during which time the young child "learns" to associate the word with picture (e.g., boy-picture of a boy), the child attempts a rapid response to the word only. This procedure is an exemplar of paired-associate learning, used to develop reading fluency "by making a sight vocabulary automatic."

More recent publications are pictured dictionaries for beginners in reading. But these "dictionaries" have not maintained their popularity, partly because they were cumbersome to use when an immediate identification need was recognized.

2. Flash cards (words)

Over the years, flash cards have been used for words, phrases, and sentences--followed by reading them in larger verbal contexts. These word cards, often unrelated to the learner's immediate needs, required rote memory, perhaps using word

configuration or shapes (overvalued according to recent research), as in cap-bad, and/or partial cues, as the o in mother or the m in man.

3. List of common words

In the recent past, teachers annointed as "reading specialists" by the superintendent or supervisor or certified via lecture courses of questionable validity taught developmental, corrective, and remedial reading by inane daily drills on a list of 220 words. These words were certified as common words and, therefore, as legitimated sight words by the compiler of the list. Not much scholarship is required to assess the value of this rote-memory route to reading failures.

4. Tell-the-child-the-word "method"

Probably one of the commonest sight "methods"extant in today's classroom is to tell the child the word when he points to it in his silent or oral reading at sight. For example, the teacher tells the child the word pick /'pik/. His word-"recognition" skills having not improved one whit, he points to the word picked in the same paragraph and the teacher says, "/'pikt/."

Undisturbed by her telling, not teaching, method, the the teacher goes merrily on her way as she "teaches" reading.

Teacher aides in today's schools become expert in telling the child words, without the so-called professional training in the teaching of reading. No need to wonder!

What options does the teacher of beginners in reading have at this juncture? First, she can guide the young learner in developing an awareness of the alphabetic principle on regularly spelled words. Second, she can use a paired-associate technique for developing relevant sight words. Third, she can resort to laborious kinaesthetic (V-A-K) or tactile (V-A-K-T) techniques when the first two fail. Fourth, she can take a long, hard look at the basic unsolved problem: the spelling system--the medium. On this last point, she will find many answers (proposals for an initial learning medium) requiring long-term research and at least one immediate answer: self-help via respelled words within common spelling patterns, as was (wuz), of (uv).

Research

Perceptual hazards inherent in the traditional, or conventional, spelling system for English are not likely to be identified and removed without long-term basic research. On the other hand, this area of verbal learning can be "opened up" by masters' theses, doctoral dissertations, and individual projects by graduate students and faculty. As "starters," some of these and other projects merit consideration:

1. Relative discriminability of the shapes (forms) of letters--in isolation and embedded in words and sentences
    a. Traditional, or conventional, alphabet
    b. Proposed alphabetic spellings
2. Validity of spellings as signals to morphology
3. Experimental validation of preparation for teaching reading
    a. Relevant concepts in educational psychology and/or psycholinguistics
    b. Relevant concepts in phonemics (phonotactics)
        (1) Segmental phonemes
        (2) Suprasegmental phonemes
    c. Relevant concepts in syntax and morphology (morphotactics)

d. Relevant concepts in orthography (graphotactics)

e. Relevant concepts in perception

(1) Factors in word perception

(2) Types of perceptual learning

(3) Perceptual processes

(4) Stress, syllable and phrase

(5) Word order

(6) Etc.

f. Relevant concepts in cognition (comprehension) and semantics

g. Relevant concepts in motivation

h. Prerequisites for a deomonstration-laboratory course in teaching developmental reading

i. Effect on pupil achievement of different types and sequences of teacher preparation.

4. Experimental study of perceptual hazards in i.l.m. (initial learning medium) proposals; e.g., i.t.a. symbols ʒ and ʃ for /z/, etc.; WES spellings of line (lien) and find (fiend) etc.

a. Visual-motor skills required for perception in reading and in spelling

b. Incompatiblity with T.O.

c. Names of proposed symbols

d. Comparative study of number and complexity of orthographic (graphotactic) rules

e. Reduction of cue, probability, and alternation learning and increase in category learning

f. Sociological, or sociolinguistic, factors in perception of visible language

g. Reduction of learning disabilities via proposed i.l.m.'s

h. Designs for computer reading and scanning

i. Etc.

5. Experimental study of reading processes

a. Visual skills required for proposed i.l.m.'s

b. Oculomotor activity

c. Perceptual and cognitive processing in relation to purposes

d. Etc.